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DARPA Announces Proposed Route for Autonomous Robotic Ground Vehicle Challenge

Defense Department Agency Submits Applications to California and Nevada for 2004 Grand Challenge between Los Angeles and Las Vegas

Arlington, VA – Organizers of the autonomous robotic ground vehicle challenge planned next year by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) have submitted applications to the California and Nevada Bureaus of Land Management seeking approval for three possible routes that start in Barstow, CA, pass through Primm, NV, and finish near Las Vegas, NV.

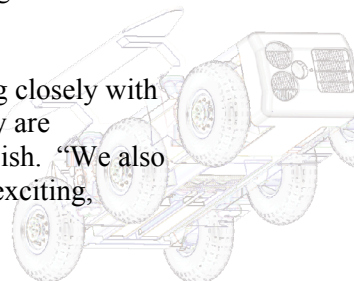
Scheduled for Saturday, March 13, 2004, the DARPA Grand Challenge for autonomous robotic ground vehicles will cover a course of approximately 250 miles, and the team that most quickly completes the route in less than the prescribed time will receive a cash prize of \$1 million. This challenge is intended to spur the accelerated development of autonomous robotic ground vehicle technology for military applications, and is the first in a series of Grand Challenges planned by DARPA.

The top priority during the initial planning stages of the event has been to develop the route, which will include a combination of off- and on-road terrain that will be cleared of pedestrians and non-competing vehicles. DARPA has been working closely with the appropriate federal, state and local authorities since the beginning of the year to gain the necessary permits to finalize the route. To help develop the route, DARPA is drawing on the expertise of SCORE International, which has more than 30 years of experience successfully planning off-road vehicle events in California and Nevada.

“We have identified several options for routes between Los Angeles and Las Vegas that are feasible and meet all of the necessary regulations,” said Col. Jose Negron, the project manager for the Grand Challenge who is leading route development efforts. “When our work is complete, we will emerge with a route that not only will be safe and avoid environmentally protected areas, but also will make it an interesting challenge.”

Each of the possible Grand Challenge routes in the Barstow/Primm/Las Vegas corridor has been carefully selected to be safe and to mitigate impacts on citizens and the environment while still offering participants a significant challenge. In order to ensure minimal community and environmental impact, Grand Challenge organizers are meeting with elected officials and community leaders along the course.

“Just as we do with all SCORE events, we are working closely with citizens all along the route to gain their input to make sure they are comfortable our plans,” said SCORE President and CEO Sal Fish. “We also want to let them know that they are going to be part of a very exciting, historical event.”



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The exact route will not be announced until two hours prior to the start of the Grand Challenge. All vehicles are required to have emergency stop capability, and the day before the event, they must undergo a safety inspection. Control vehicles also will be present along the entire route to ensure maximum safety and minimal environmental impact. As of June 18, 2003, 27 teams had submitted applications to enter the Grand Challenge.

DARPA is the central research and development organization for DoD. The Agency manages and directs basic and applied research and development projects for DoD, and pursues research and technology where the risk and payoff are both very high and where success may provide dramatic advances for traditional military roles and missions. The Grand Challenge web site – www.darpa.mil/grandchallenge – serves as the gateway for updates on the event and a discussion forum for participants and interested observers.

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